Oliphant 1

Marteena Oliphant

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The World Unseen-Sebastiao Salgado

Rhetorical Analysis Paper 1

What is in a picture? Usually a picture is said to be a worth 1,000 words. If someone was to question what was the essence of a photograph—or what makes a photo have meaning Sebastiao Salgado would tell you that “It’s not the photographer who makes the picture, but the person being photographed” (Fetterman *Chicago Art Magazine* 2010). Yes, the subjects in Salgado’s work, makes the photos speak for itself. Using a constant black and white hue for a vast majority of his work makes the pieces more intriguing and helps develop a well rounded understanding of why his photos can be observed through pathos, ethos, and logos techniques. He simply makes the unbelievable visuals, believable. When observing Sebastiao Salgado’s work you are automatically engulfed in the world of photography, leaving the viewer with an aesthetic experience beyond comparison. Sebastiao Salgado comes from a rich Brazilian background. Of eight children, he is the youngest and only male child born to his parents. He studied in Paris and Sao Paulo, with intentions on having a career with the World Bank; however Salgado found his true calling was photography (McKiernan, 1991). Now at the age of 57, Salgado can be classified as one of the most influential cultural photographers of the 20th century.

Salgado’s work is rare as it captures life unseen, and provides a world view for people who want to know what life is like past the proximity of their own neighborhoods and addresses. Mystical in their entirety, it is difficult to understand what this artist may be trying to convey through his work at first encounter. However, once interpreted and analyzed it is understood that Salgado is an artist whose works are ones in the business of evoking of emotions. With an interest in the lifestyles of inhabitants of underdeveloped or unindustrialized countries, Salgado focuses his work on the Latin Americas, Asia, and Africa (McKiernan, 1991). These places are known for their agriculturally, or other natural resource centered economies. The three photos being analyzed in this paper are from a collection that Salgado plainly named, *“Workers”*. This collection, which was given life in 1986, was assembled to display the disappearance of the communities that thrive off of labor in our world. Heart wrenching at first sight, these photographs provide an unparalleled scope of what consists of “living” in places most people wouldn’t even imagine to go. When examining Sebastiao Salgado’s work, there is a witnessing of the some unique events of the world at its most distant ends. Salgado is noted to be “a master at making the frightening into something beautiful and as a result is certainly the most admired international photographer today” (McKiernan, 1991). He communicates a need for empathy, and humility through his photography, rather than sorrow or pity. Pathos, which is a product of rhetoric, is an evident element in his works. Ones’ initial reaction to the sights captured in his photographs may be those of guilt, or shame for one’s own nature or lifestyle.

This first photograph taken by Sebastaio Salgado is of a worker who seems to be climbing out of worker ditch or dugout. The location of this picture is undisclosed. The caption that was provided with the photo, stated that these workers had got done gathering raw ingredients that are used in the process of making many of the materials that we use in more economically advanced places like the United States (cite). The work that is done by the people in this photograph is the reason why such populous places are able to be recognized as such commodity driven nations. The workers captured in this moment are the people that get discredited for the many contributions they give to our world, especially nations like The United States, when it pertains to the materialistic culture that we thrive on. When observing this photo for elements of ethos, it is easily assumed that this man belongs to a manually laborious culture or group of people. You can sense a lot of pain and distress from the way in which he is climbing up the make shift ladder. However, perception is of the individual—although interpreted to be an undesirable task, this man depicted may have no reservations about the work he does.

 The second photograph depicts several very stalk, and rigid people, who seem to be trying to start, or have recently started a fire. This land that they are standing in doesn’t look fruitful, or very inhabitable. I imagine this region may be some place on the continent of Africa. This picture has a graciousness to it from the way the sun’s rays seem to be penetrating the mountain tops in the very background of the photo. The scenery in this photo clashes, and in turn leaves a sense of struggle for tranquility, between the harshness of the land, and the serenity of the sky. The sex of the subjects in this photo is hard to interpret. This element represents the differences between what the audience and subjects practices when it comes to rituals such as dressing, as well as availability of materials to be in an American Context of what would be, “properly clothed”. This photo evokes an air of ambiguity. It isn’t easy to read what Salgado is trying to convey through this specific photograph, however, one can use their own judgment to interpret what kind of visual devices Salgado is utilizing here. There is a sense of a primitive group of people, who hold steadfast to the ways of the people who inhabited this region before them. They seem to be a part of a close knit society, where social roles have been established and are practiced just for the need of survival.

 The third photograph was the most expressive, and had the most meaning behind it. This is a photo of a person who is seemingly working on a Tea plantation in Rwanda. Knowing that this country has faced years of political and civil turmoil, it was an interesting focal point to make a subject in a series of photos. The person in this photo is obviously someone who has been working with their hands for a majority of their lives. What is most pivotal about this photo is that it focuses on a single area of the body emphasizing the importance of dexterous labor in this geographic location. This photo can help you reach a point of understanding for what life is like for the average everyday person who does not live in constant comfortableness. When imagining everyday jobs that require use of the hands, compared to what this person is doing, makes it seem that there is no difference between cultures. However, the working on a Tea Plantation may be all this person knows due to economic or educational constraints beyond their control. Moreover, there seems to be an importance of the tea leaves to the person, as they almost look as if they are embracing the leaves, further justifying my latter statement.

Of all the photographers that were available to research Salgado’s work is impressive in the sense that nothing is of the world that we know. The unfamiliarity that is felt by observing his photographs is probably one the most rewarding experiences anyone who appreciates photography can have. It’s almost like having the world at your fingertips—you become a part of the culture that is exhibited so boundlessly. Salgado’s work is set to communicate a worldview and a message of inclusiveness. People are all the same but have been taught that they are different because of societal or cultural institutions. Salgado’s work inspires unity, understanding and oneness among the human race.

Works Cited

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